What is claimed is:

1.   A method for confirming that a recipient of an information-bearing notification has received and read the notification comprising:

3   receiving the information-bearing notification from a sender of the notification;

4   presenting the information-bearing notification, including a presenting a word

5   sequence, to the recipient;

6   accepting an audio input in response to presenting the word sequence;

7   determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient speaking the

8   presented word sequence; and

9   if the accepted audio includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence,

10   transmitting a confirmation to the sender of the notification.

1   2.   The method of claim 1 further comprising determining whether the

2   accepted audio input includes the voice of an intended recipient, and transmitting the

3   confirmation to the sender if the accepted audio both includes the recipient speaking the

4   presented word sequence and the accepted audio includes the voice of the intended

5   recipient.

1   3.   The method of claim 1 wherein presenting the word sequence to the

2   recipient includes presenting a graphical representation of the word sequence.

1   4.   The method of claim 3 wherein presenting the graphical representation of

2   the word sequence includes presenting said graphical representation on a display.

1   5.   The method of claim 1 wherein presenting the word sequence to the

2   recipient includes presenting an audible representation of the word sequence.

1   6.   The method of claim 5 wherein presenting the audible representation of

2   the word sequence includes playing a stored audio recording of the word sequence.

7.   The method of claim 5 wherein presenting the audible representation of the word sequence includes applying a speech synthesis algorithm to the word sequence to form the audible representation.

8.   The method of claim 5 wherein presenting the audible representation of the word sequence includes transmitting the audible representation over a telephone network and accepting the audio response includes receiving the audio response over the telephone network.

9.   The method of claim 1 wherein determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes applying a speech recognition algorithm to the accepted audio input.

10.   The method of claim 9 wherein applying the speech recognition algorithm includes computing a resulting word sequence from the audio input and determining whether the audio input includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes comparing the resulting word sequence to the word sequence of the notification.

11.   The method of claim 9 wherein applying the speech recognition algorithm includes time-aligning the word sequence of the notification and the audio input.

12.   The method of claim 9 wherein applying the speech recognition algorithm includes computing a match score characterizing a similarity between the word sequence and the audio input.

13.   The method of claim 12 wherein determining whether the audio input includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes comparing the match score with a threshold score.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein accepting the audio input includes accepting a plurality of segments of the audio input each associated with a different part of the word sequence of the notification, and wherein determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient speaking the word sequence includes determining whether each of the plurality of segments of the audio input includes the recipient speaking the associated part of the word sequence.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein presenting the word sequence includes presenting each of the different parts of the word sequence in turn and accepting the audio input associated with that part before presenting another of the different parts.

16. A method for forming a contract between a first party and a second party comprising:
offering terms of the contract to the second party, including presenting a word sequence to the second party;
accepting an audio input from the second party in response to offering the terms of the contract;
determining whether the accepted audio input includes the second party speaking the presented word sequence;
informing the first party if the audio input includes the second party speaking the word sequence.

17. The method of claim 16 wherein determining whether the accepted audio input includes the second party speaking the presented word sequence includes applying a speech recognition algorithm to the accepted audio input to determine a word sequence present in the audio input.

18. The method of claim 16 wherein determining whether the accepted audio input includes the second party speaking the presented word sequence includes applying a speaker recognition algorithm to the accepted audio input to compare voice characteristics of an intended party with whom the first party desires to form a contract and voice characteristics present in the audio input.
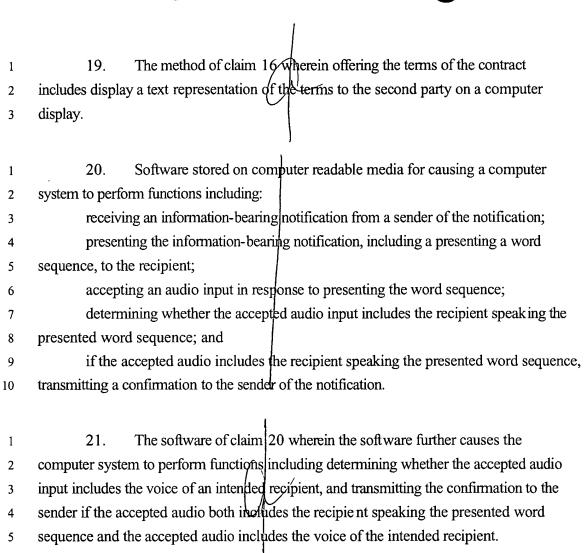
19.   The method of claim 16 wherein offering the terms of the contract includes display a text representation of the terms to the second party on a computer display.

20.   Software stored on computer readable media for causing a computer system to perform functions including:

receiving an information-bearing notification from a sender of the notification;

presenting the information-bearing notification, including a presenting a word sequence, to the recipient;

accepting an audio input in response to presenting the word sequence;

determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence; and

if the accepted audio includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence, transmitting a confirmation to the sender of the notification.

21.   The software of claim 20 wherein the software further causes the computer system to perform functions including determining whether the accepted audio input includes the voice of an intended recipient, and transmitting the confirmation to the sender if the accepted audio both includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence and the accepted audio includes the voice of the intended recipient.

22.   An automated notification confirmation system comprising:

means for receiving an information-bearing notification from a sender of the notification;

means for presenting the information-bearing notification, including a presenting a word sequence, to the recipient;

means for accepting an audio input in response to presenting the word sequence;

means for determining whether the accepted audio input includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence; and

means for transmitting a confirmation to the sender of the notification if the accepted audio includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence.

1   23.   The automated system of claim 22 further comprising means for

2   determining whether the accepted audio input includes the voice of an intended recipient,

3   and means for transmitting the confirmation to the sender if the accepted audio both

4   includes the recipient speaking the presented word sequence and the accepted audio

5   includes the voice of the intended recipient.

6

1